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“REMOVING BARRIERS TO GROWTH: HOW LANDMINES AFFECT AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT”

**TICAD 7 Side Event co-organized by HALO Trust, Association for Aid
and Relief (AAR) Japan and Mines Advisory Group (MAG)**

27 August 2019, 18:00-19:30

Annex F203 - Pacifico Yokoha

Statement by Ambassador Smail Chergui

African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security

Ms. Yukie Osa, President of AAR Japan

Mr. James Cowan, CEO of the HALO Trust

Ms. Eri Komukai, JICA Senior Advisor

Ms. Margaret Arach Orech, Director of Uganda Landmine Survivors Association

[Representative] of the Nikken Corporation

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join this side event and wish to extend my thanks and appreciation to the co-organizers for bringing this important topic to TICAD. Indeed, Africa's development cannot be fully realized with the continued existence of the deadly legacy of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

Twenty years have passed since the entry into force of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. African nations were without a doubt strong advocates in the global process leading to its adoption. We proudly look

back at the strong support and active participation of Member States and African civil society organizations in making the Convention a reality.

During the course of those twenty years, remarkable progress has been achieved. As of today, 95% of the States in the continent are party to the Convention. At the time of accession to the Convention, 25 States declared areas under their jurisdiction in which anti-personnel mines were known or suspected to be emplaced. By 2018, 13 of these States declared that demining operations have been completed, thereby ensuring that anti-personnel landmines will no longer cause death or disability among their populations, nor undermine socio-economic development.

I must also underscore that such achievements would not have been possible without the generous support provided by international partners to national mine action programs. I specifically wish to express gratitude to Japan for its consistent support over the last two decades. I also wish

to commend the demining operators, including the co-organizers of this event, for their tremendous efforts and valuable historical contribution to a Mine Free Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we celebrate this progress, we must acknowledge that mine action in Africa is facing a serious risk, especially as international attention and resources are diverted away to other security and development priorities, regionally and globally. As of this year, there are eleven (11) African State Parties that are yet to complete mine clearance pursuant to Article 5 of the Convention. These states are gravely challenged by the sharp reduction in international support, which is at its lowest level. It is estimated that international support to mine action in Africa has dropped by two-thirds in the last five (5) years. This trend is slowing down clearance efforts and prolonging the adverse effect of landmines on communities and on development efforts.

We believe that the so-called donor fatigue confronting mine action in Africa is due to the limited understanding of the humanitarian and socio-economic consequences of landmines across the continent. First, it must be underlined that the survivors, already among the most vulnerable populations, continue to live in poverty and agony, having little or no access to trauma care, physical rehabilitation services, or socio-economic reintegration support. They remain labeled as mere victims and are denied the opportunity to fully become productive members of their communities.

Second, some of the African countries that are yet to complete clearance have the most densely contaminated minefields in the world. These mines are substantially emplaced in fertile land, in strategic trade corridors, and along wildlife migration routes. Therefore, the adverse socio-economic impact is significant, multi-dimensional, and with long-term implications.

In terms of agricultural development, and at the community level, it should be noted that in some cases, the arable village land is in close proximity of less than 100 meters to minefields. The cumulative effect of minefields has been economic hardships on impacted communities due to limited access to land for cultivation and access to water sources, as well as regular loss of livestock that ventures into the minefields to graze. This further exacerbates food insecurity and weakens community resilience, particularly in impoverished regions. The existence of minefields also deter larger scale agricultural investments which can contribute to food security at the broader national level.

When it comes to bio-diversity and tourism development, the impact of landmines has been particularly devastating in the southern Africa region. For example, the trilateral border region linking Zimbabwe to Mozambique and South Africa hosts some of the world's diverse wildlife. But these regions also contains some of the world's most dense minefields. Studies have posited that landmines in the region is

preventing wildlife movement along the trilateral border region and may have a long-term impact on the gene pool of species. Demining the area would therefore unlock great opportunities for tourism development in the Gonarezhou National Park in southern Zimbabwe. It will also create linkages to the Kruger National Park in neighbouring South Africa and the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique. A similar situation can be found along the border between Angola and Namibia, where minefields are undermining wildlife migration and contributing to human and wildlife conflict.

The impact of landmines on cross-border trade is another area that is under-studied, but that is now facing neighbouring countries seeking to improve trade relations. For example, with the positive developments in the diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the two countries are considering large-scale infrastructure development across their common borders to stimulate trade. Removing landmines on both sides of the borders will therefore be essential if such project are to be

realized. This also applies to the broader implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area which recently entered into force.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The aspects I have just highlighted warrants the development of a deeper understanding of the socio-economic impact of landmines, and concrete efforts towards streamlining mine action into national developmental plan and the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda. As policy makers, practitioners and advocates, we have to re-craft the narrative accordingly if we are to succeed in reinstating regional and international interest and commitment to mine action.

On its part, the African Union remains committed to working closely with the impacted member states and the international operators in advocating for innovative and development-oriented efforts towards demining in order to unlock the full socio-economic potential of the impacted areas. We remain committed to strengthen efforts with our

Japanese partners, Halo Trust, MAG and African Civil society organizations, in realizing the 2025 Goal.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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Removing Barriers to Growth: How Landmines Affect African Development

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